SUMMARY

THE PRINCIPLES OF TEACHING INTERPRETATION

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Mr. Matthay remarked that his lecture consisted really of six lectures compressed into one, and it would therefore be of inordinate length. For this reason, also, we can give but a résumé of this lecture.

Six Important Points for Piano Teachers

He said: "The pursuit implied by the term Piano-teaching is so enormously complex, that at first glance it seems hopeless to try to cover the ground in one short discourse. All one can do is to select some of the more salient points where the young teacher (and often the old one also) is apt to fail. It is therefore understood that no attempt is here made to deal exhaustively with the subject. I have selected the following points: (1) the difference between Practice and mere Strumming; (2) the difference between Teaching and Cramming; (3) how the pupil's mind can be brought upon his work; (4) correct ideas of Time and Shape; (5) the element of Rubato; and (6) the element of Duration and Pedalling."

What is Good Teaching?

Mr. Matthay continued, that it would be impossible to make clear even these particular essentials of teaching. without first taking a preliminary, cursory glance at the whole problem of teaching. To begin with, we could not, accurately speaking, "teach" anyone anything, in the sense of being able directly to lodge any knowledge of ours in another mind. One could only stimulate another mind to *wish to learn*, and place before that other mind the things desirable to be learnt. We cannot teach others, but we can help them to learn.

Here we come at once to one of the special points to be discussed, the difference between good teaching and bad teaching, viz., that good teaching consists not in trying to make the pupil "do things" so that it may seem like playing, but in trying to make him *think*, so that it may really be playing. In the first place we try to turn out an automaton, but in the second case we prompt the pupil to be a living intelligent being.

Pupils usually do not realise that it is they who have to make the effort to learn; hence that is the first thing to make plain to them. True, there are "direct" and empiric methods of teaching, but such directness can only refer to *the method of placing things before a pupil.* Work is often brought back worse than at the preceding lesson, owing to practice having been purely automatic. Often this is the pupil's fault, but more often still, the teacher's, owing to his not having shown the pupil how to apply his brains during practice.

The Necessity of Attention

Practice should not consist in trying to "make the piece go better," but in trying to make oneself *see* it better —

understand it better musically and technically. This implies a constant process of analysis during practice, musical analysis and technical analysis. This means we must really listen, both outwardly and inwardly. Nothing is more fatal musically than omitting to do this.

To try to draw without looking at the paper is no worse than trying to play without careful aural attention. This is where "Ear-Training" comes in. But Ear-Training should always mean *training the mind to observe* and analyse Pitch and Time so as to understand Music better, and should never be conducted without that immediate purpose in view. There can be no real practice, nor real lesson, without insistence all the time on such *real* Ear-Training. All this implies the closest possible attention during the practice-hour. Such close attention, in conjunction with a keen imagination, is the distinguishing feature between the work of the talented and un-talented person. One can therefore raise one's status, musically, simply by insisting on close attention to what one is doing, and more important still, to what one *should be doing*, musically and technically.

Such persistent use of the judgement and imagination is not only required from the pupil, but also from the teacher. As teachers, our powers must be applied, analytically, in a two-fold direction. *Firstly*, we must analyse the music we wish to teach, its Structure and its Feeling; and, *secondly*, we must analyse the pupil's doings, comparing them to this ideal we have formed, so that we can diagnose exactly where the pupil fails, and why he fails. Such analysis comes under *four* headings: (*a*) we must analyse *what* the pupil is actually doing; (*b*) we must analyse the faults thereby perceived; (*c*) we must analyse *why* the pupil is making those faults; and (4) we must analyse the pupil's attitude of mind, so that we may know how to treat him.

The Use and Misuse of Example

The lecturer here took these matters in detail. He then pointed out that teachers must learn to explain every point, and must besides educate themselves as musicians and as actual performers, so as to be able to demonstrate the various points by actual example when necessary. Example, by itself, however, was shown to be useless, as its tendency is here again to turn the pupil into "an automatic ape" — example should always be accompanied by full explanation as to shape and feeling, the *purpose* of the means of expression applied. The opening bars of Schumann's *Warum* were here played, and it was shown how an inexperienced pupil would turn this into a laughable parody unless such explanations were given.

Enthusiasm

Allusion was then made to the necessity for enthusiasm, for unless the teacher could all the time show himself really interested in his work, he could not expect his pupils to give the truly exhausting attention required if really good work was to be accomplished. And enthusiasm would grow in us, if we but tried our best all the time. Enthusiasm, however, would not suffice by itself. The teacher must not only be willing to help, but must know *how* to do so, otherwise his work would after all prove a failure.

Cramming v. the Cultivation of Judgement and of Imagination

Mr. Matthay next considered the radical distinction between *useful* teaching and *useless* teaching.

The *wrong* attitude is, to try to make the pupil directly imitate the musical effects, the "points," etc., which your musical sense tells you are required, but without explaining

the *why* and *wherefore* musically. Thus you turn your pupil into a mere responsive automaton, a Trilby to your Svengalism. This is sheer "cramming," and can have no abiding influence educationally.

The *right* attitude is to insist on your pupil trying to see for himself all the time, to the best of his capacity, musically and technically. You must *force* him to use his own judgement and imagination, so that that may prompt him all the time; and you must guide that judgement and imagination all the time, so that right seeing and thinking is learnt.

In the first case you teach your pupil to play without thinking, whereas in the second case you teach him to play *because* he is thinking, and is thinking rightly.

Two Main Points — "Key-Resistance" and the "Time-Spot"

To bring your pupil's mind on his work, you must insist on two main points. You must teach him to attend, in the first place, to "Key-resistance," and, in the second place, to "Time-spot," and by this means you ensure *musical* attention — attention to musical shape and feeling.

By attention to key-resistance is meant a constant attention to the obstruction the key offers before and *during* its descent. As this resistance varies with every difference in the tone you are making, you can thus judge (and by this means only) what force to apply, so that you may obtain the tone *musically* desired.

By attention to "Time-spot" is meant that you must realise that all music implies Progression, and you must use your inward ear and your outer physical ear to determine *where* in the musical progression each and every sound is precisely due. You must make clear to the pupil that sounds have no musical significance whatever unless they are made to suggest Progression: there must always be a

sense of Progression, or *movement towards definite landmarks* — a growth with a definite purpose, a rhythmical and emotional purpose. This principle of progression applies equally to the smallest segments of music, and to the largest; — it applies whether we deal with a progression merely of three notes, or a complete phrase, or a whole movement. No child should ever be allowed to touch the piano without being at once shown how this principle of *progression onwards, towards cadences,* etc., applies everywhere. Mr. Matthay illustrated all these points and went into a mass of detail; he also said that he had pointed out the importance of this idea of *progression* and "scanning" of the music during the last 20 years of his teaching life, and in his *First Principles* (Advice to Teachers), but that the passage was often passed by, without its being realised that it applies during every minute of one's teaching life. He pointed out, further, that only by strict attention to this principle of progression could one ensure the correction of "sloppiness" in passage-work, and learn to play the notes in between the pulses accurately and musically.

This matter was illustrated, as also the fact that octave passages, etc., divided between the two hands, still depended on the same mental principle; unless indeed, the student had not learnt the right ways of Technique, had not mastered the "Act of Resting," when he would here fail owing to his being unable to express himself properly. It was pointed out that to keep this principle of progression in view while playing a long extended movement is indeed the hardest task a player has to deal with; and that success here depends, mainly, on an accurate *memory* of the proportionate importance of all the component progressions of the piece; and upon a constant self-control in executing the musical picture thus to be realised as a perfect whole.

Continuity and Rubato

Mr. Matthay then showed, that to enable one to render a piece *continuous* in performance, the *tempo* must be continuous, although it also depended on a correct laying out of tone-values and of the emotional stress. "Remember," he said, "a new Tempo means a new piece — a new train of thought, and that each change of Tempo needs a new adjustment of the listener's attention. Constantly recurring ritardos, and accellerandos, unless on a large scale, are therefore fatal to Continuity. But we cannot express ourselves adequately without Time-*inflections*, hence the necessity of *Rubato*." Rubato was shown to be requisite in all music, although some of the older masters required it less than do our modern composers. Rubato should be taught even to children — real Rubato, not playing out of time.

The illustrations of Rubato were specially chosen to prove their necessity even in Beethoven and Bach, although Rubato requires subtle application in these masters. Rubato might extend over a few notes only, or over whole phrases. Rubato was shown to be of two distinct kinds: (*a*) where, for the sake of emphasising a note or several notes, we delay the time, and must then make good the time by hastening the subsequent notes so as to return to the pulse at the crisis of the phrase, etc.; and (*b*) where, for the sake of the *agitato* effect, we begin by hastening the phrase, and must then delay the subsequent notes so as to bring us back again to the pulse at the chief syllable of the phrase — near its end. These two forms can be combined even during the course of a single phrase, and often are. In all cases it is of primary importance to determine exactly *where* we must return to the pulse, and also to determine the *cause*

of the Rubato — whether caused in the first instance by a retardation or by an accelleration. The actual degree and curve of the Time-swerve must, however, be left to the fancy of the moment, and the effects must never be applied so as to become noticeable *as such*. These points were made clear by the lecturer by means of short excerpts, showing, for instance, how impossible a Chopin Nocturne would be without Rubato.

The next point, likewise brought home by examples, was to prove how a Rubato would serve to make clear the climax of a phrase in spite of a diminuendo. It was pointed out that the most striking emphasis we can give to any note is its coincidence with the pulse after that has been swerved from during a Rubato.

It was also shown, by examples from Chopin, etc., how Rubato is required to depict agitated feelings — whereas, to give the effect of decision, calmness, truculence, etc., we must avoid Rubato for the moment.

In passages consisting of notes of contrasting length, the tendency should be to emphasise these differences by giving proportionately more time to the longer notes and less to the shorter ones; and incidentally we should find that the same rule applies with regard to *tone*-variety, the tone varying somewhat in accordance with the length of the notes.

A somewhat related tonal effect is required when we continue a phrase after a long note or rest — we must restart the continuation with far less tone than was given to the last long note, otherwise we should have the effect of a new phrase there.

Tone Contrasts

Mr. Matthay, after exemplifying this, said the importance of Rubato does not minimise the importance of Tone-

contrasts and contrasts of Duration; but the absence of both these last is also often overlooked by the teacher. Although made miserable by their absence in the pupils' performances, the teacher, owing to his not noticing the real reason of his discomfort failed to make the slight effort necessary to remedy these things. Most of the failure does not arise from paucity of tone, but from the absence of low tints. Most students, in fact, never get near a *pianissimo*, and accompaniments are always played far too loudly; this was exemplified by a few bars from the opening of the "*Moonlight*" Sonata, it being pointed out that the difference between the good and evil rendering was attributable solely to the "cutting away" of tone in the first instance. Students also invariably played the beginnings of phrases far too high up in tone, hence their failure to show the climaxes.

With regard to the actual teaching of the wherewithal of tone-contrasts — the teaching of Touch, the rationale of the processes of producing Tone, Duration and Agility, there could of course be no teaching worthy the name unless these things were all the time most fully explained and made clear to the pupil. Even Germany, where instruction in these matters had been so hideously bad, even Germany was now waking up to these requirements of the present day.

Pedalling

The lecturer then went on to the subject of Pedalling, which he said was mostly so badly overlooked that even artists' performances were often no better than a child's daubs. It was pitiable to see the amount of care sometimes bestowed on making the fingers execute good phrasing, duration and colouring, when in the meantime the whole effect was wiped out by the right foot. The fault could in most cases be again traced to sheer non-attention to the

actual sounds coming from the piano — playing being too often regarded as a mere muscular exercise instead of the making of musical sounds for a musical purpose.

Mr. Matthay here demonstrated the striking contrasts to be obtained merely by varying the duration of sounds; and pointed out, as to the details of pedalling, that we have to learn to syncopate the pedal in legato and in legatissimo, and further to learn the value of incomplete tenuti, emphasis by the cutting short of a sustained effect at a pulse, and half-pedalling effects, all of which matters received full illustration. This matter was summed up by saying that we must always remember that music depends not only on our fingers but also on our right foot.

Sincere Art

In his peroration, Mr. Matthay indicated how Musical Art was always on the wrong path unless it was employed to depict things felt and experienced. To be sincere, Art must always be used for the purpose of expressing Mood or Feeling. But it did not follow that by making this endeavour we should succeed, although we should be working in the right direction. Also, there was the question as to the appropriateness of the moods chosen to be expressed. Mr. Matthay then tried to show that in the true basis of Music — Pulse, Rhythm, Progression — we could find the reason of its great power over the emotions, this basis bringing it into intimate union with all the vital manifestations of Nature, and with the ultimate hidden facts of the Universe and Infinitude itself.